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News Policy Note 0824-0900

International Telecommunication Union Conferences in Geneva

SUMMARY:

The Administrative Radio Conference of the International Telecommunication Union opened in Geneva Aug. 17 and is expected to continue for four months. The Plenipotentiary Conference of the ITU will convene in Geneva Oct. 14 and will run concurrently with the Radio Conference for the last two months. The conferences will terminate at the same time, approximately Dec. 16. The US will participate in both. One of the leading users of telecommunications, the US has always been much interested in the furthering of the objectives of the ITU, which is a specialized UN agency.

Treatment: Inasmuch as the United States has always strongly supported the participation of the ITU in the UN Expanded Program of Technical Assistance and the participation of all countries, especially those less developed, in the work of the International Consultative Committees for Radio and for Telegraph and Telephone, we should seek to disseminate information concerning the ITU as widely and intensively as practicable. This is especially recommended in our output to less-developed countries, where a lack of knowledge of the purposes and scope of the ITU has prevented them from gaining the fullest benefit from their membership in the ITU.

Our output should reflect the fact that the ITU is essential to the efficient operation of international telecommunications. We also point out that the ITU convention establishes the basic principles underlying telecommunications, and the conferences serve as a medium for settling difficulties, usually by compromise, and drawing up regulations on the procedures to be followed in every aspect of telecommunications, i.e., technical, operating, and tariff questions.

NOTES: (a) In handling the proceedings at the sessions, we should keep in close touch with the US delegation in Geneva and take our cues from the delegation's statements.

(b) Your attention is especially invited to the section "Possible Sensitive Issues" in the background below.

BACKGROUND: The following material is contained in a memorandum which IOP received today from the State Department:

The Radio Conference will be the first meeting of its kind since the present Radio Regulations were drawn up at Atlantic City in 1947. The last Plenipotentiary

Conference

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was held in Buenos Aires in 1952.

There are 95 Members and five Associate Members of the Union, of whom approximately 80, including most of the Soviet bloc, normally attend these conferences. In addition, certain specialized agencies of the UN (such as the ICAO, UNESCO, IMCO, and WMO) as well as the UN itself, will probably attend as observers.

The United States position for the Radio Conference is contained in a document (two volumes) entitled "U.S.A. Proposals for the Ordinary Administrative Radio Conference," copies of which were transmitted to a number of Missions with a request that they be handed to the appropriate telecommunications authorities of the various countries. Copies of the U.S.A. Proposals were also sent to the ITU for distribution to the countries, members of the Union. In addition, an explanation or amplification of the United States proposals was sent out to most of the United States Missions abroad in CA-9908 of May 14 and CA-10046 of May 19, 1959.

The agenda of the meeting includes a revision of the Radio Regulations (Atlantic City, 1947); a review of the activities of the International Frequency Registration Board and the election of the members of that Board.

The purpose of the Plenipotentiary Conference as defined in the Buenos Aires Convention, 1952, is to revise the Convention and to deal with all other matters deemed necessary. Among the important proposals already made, and among the matters brought to the attention of the Conference by the ITU Administrative Council, are: The question of the adoption of a consolidated budget and working capital fund; the possible reorganization of the International Frequency Registration Board and the top echelon of the Secretariat General; the assimilation of the personnel and the present pension funds into the UN Common System; and the expansion of the technical assistance program of the Union.

Possible Sensitive Issues at the Conference

The Plenipotentiary Conference is the supreme organ of the Union and is the proper body for the discussion of political problems. Presumably the Soviet bloc will endeavor to have Communist China recognized as the "China" listed as a Member of the Union, and to obtain membership for the so-called "German Democratic Republic" (GDR). If an intensive political campaign is planned by the USSR, it will also include a drive for membership for North Korea, north Vietnam, and Outer Mongolia.

The Radio Conference is technical and it is probable that, with the Plenipotentiary Conference so close at hand, the Soviet bloc will confine itself to statements for the record concerning Communist China and the GDR. The US and the USSR will also be the opposing leaders on the questions of the election of a Secretary General and the structure of the IFRB. The US Delegation to the Radio Conference intends to propose that the latter question first be considered by the Radio Conference which will make recommendations to the Plenipotentiary Conference.

Possible sensitive technical issues at the Radio Conference are:

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Frequency

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Frequency Allocation Table

One of the most difficult tasks facing the Radio Conference is the establishment of a new Frequency Allocation Table which represents the division or apportionment of radio spectrum space to the different radio services, such as aeronautical, broadcasting, maritime, amateur, etc. The United States proposals for the Allocation Table contain a number of provisions which are considered essential and vital to the operation of military electronic systems employed in support of world-wide mutual defense and treaty agreements. These military electronics applications comprise weapon control and guidance systems, sophisticated communications networks, and vital radar warning systems which employ a variety of frequencies so necessary to counter various enemy modes of attack. Preliminary reports indicate that there is significant disparity between the frequency allocation proposals of the United States and those of other countries, some of which desire to increase the amount of space allocated to high frequency broadcasting, for example, at the expense of the other services. This disparity may be attributed to the lack of appreciation by foreign civil telecommunication authorities of the vast development and importance of electronic systems within modern military organizations.

International Frequency Registration Board (IFRB)

When the Radio Regulations were last amended (Atlantic City, 1947), it was agreed that the IFRB should maintain a published radio frequency list which would accurately reflect, on a current basis, the actual use being made of the radio spectrum by users in all countries. This was never achieved but remains a fundamental objective of the United States. We now want to propose (a) an enlargement of the scope and resources of the IFRB, giving the Board more executive authority and a better chance to obtain the facts needed to do the job, and (b) a revision of the system of notification and registration of frequencies, de-emphasizing to some extent the importance of mere dates of notification (in foretelling priority rights) and introducing some degree of what some countries have termed a "use-it-or-lose-it" philosophy. Generally speaking, foreign attitudes on (a) will depend on positions taken regarding (b). Countries which have "rights" based on dates but have not yet used them might stand to lose, while those which are economically more able to exploit the spectrum quickly would gain, as would those whose "rights" are inadequate or possibly nonexistent.

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